



What's the point of it all if no one uses your library? Using and creating evidence to promote a library service – ongoing research

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Introduction

Marketing a library service should be an ongoing, integral, process essential because, what's the point of it all if no-one uses your library?

Before beginning the marketing process do some initial research concerning;

- marketing in general and specifically library/information service marketing,
- your users, who they are, where they are, what they want (particular segments of users will want different things),
- your organisation and your library –mission statements/visions will assist to determine marketing goals (Wakeham, 2004),
- available resources in terms of time, budget, staff, and expertise.

Whilst this information is essential for your broad overall plan, a separate detailed plan may be necessary for individual initiatives or projects (Grey & Skildum-Reid, 2003). The direction of your plan must consider the library's and the parent organizations mission (Wakeham, 2004) and vision.

The promotion

After completing the initial research, conducting a user survey and writing the marketing plan, a specific promotion project was developed for the National Resource Centre (NRC) of the Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia (ADCA). This promotion entailed compiling a list of recommended alcohol and other drugs (AOD) resources for health libraries to use as an acquisition tool, in a similar format to the medical library's Brandon and Hill list (Hill, Stickell, & Crow, 2003). Targeting other health libraries is a relationship marketing approach (or influencing the influentials) which uses a referral market group to do the marketing on your behalf (Besant, 2000) (Turner, Wilkie, & Rosen, 2004). An AOD resource pack was sent to most Australian health libraries and contained:

- a letter of introduction,
- the list *ADCA recommends...Alcohol and other drugs resources for the health library*,
- a small container of peppermints branded with the NRC's DRUG database logo,
- promotional material about ADCA, NRC and all of our major products/services.

ADCA recommends... as part of an AOD resource pack was attractive as a promotional project because there was target audience familiarity, it delivered a value added product and it allowed many of the following literature supported features to be incorporated.

- Promote to particular target segments/audiences (Turner et al., 2004) (Wakeham, 2004). In this case health librarians were the target.
- Use other libraries as a personal contact for your service (Turner et al., 2004).
- Add value to the knowledge acquisition process (Cheng, 2000) and deliver a quality product as good as it claims to be (Wakeham, 2004). A great deal of time and effort went into the product.
- Include some non-traditional items (Siess, 2004) and give away free food (Neilson, 2002) (Siess, 2004). The peppermint pack was novel and appealing.
- Launch the promotion during a special week, (Siess, 2004) (Crisp, 2001) (Turner et al., 2004). The promotion was launched initially during Australian Library and Information Week and then one month later during Drug Action Week (which is an ADCA initiative).
- Use the organisations communication methods (Siess, 2004). News items appeared in *ADCA News* and advertising appearing on our hosted electronic bulletin board *Update* (Ashcroft & Hoey, 2001; Cowell, 2004).
- Use branding to demonstrate consistency and for product identification (Tompson, 2003). Logos were prominent and used on the peppermint dispenser, all promotional material and on the cover of *ADCA recommends...*

Evaluation

This promotion is being evaluated at the time of writing, using both output and outcome measures (Matthews, 2003).

The output measures are in the form of;

- a short survey sent to all recipients of the resource pack asking about increased awareness of the NRC, and the usefulness and quality of the product that was sent to them,
- existing mechanisms to measure the number of enquiries, inter-library loans and the like.

It is important to keep the ultimate purpose of marketing in sight (Dworkin, 2001). Outcome measures measuring project effectiveness (Matthews, 2003) should indicate a positive impact on the target group, the resource centre and the parent organization.

When measuring the impact on the target group, it could be asked; is there evidence of an increased awareness of the NRC on a professional level, has the standing of the NRC been enhanced in the professional health library sector and has the establishment of the NRC as an authority in this specialised health area been accelerated?

When measuring impact on the resource centre, it could be noted that NRC staff experienced professional development opportunities in aspects of marketing and also in collection development. The best use of resources (e.g. budget, suppliers, expertise and staff time) and feedback on improvements for future projects could also be considered.

When measuring impact on the parent organisation and membership it could be noted that there was feedback and assistance from ADCA's organisation and membership (Cowell, 2004) in producing *ADCA recommends..* presenting a unique opportunity to stage a joint project. It also exposed the parent organization to the NRC's professionalism and in recognising health libraries as an important health sector entity.

The ultimate measure is, did the promotion achieve progress toward the NRC's vision:

"To be recognised as the principal and most valued source of AOD professional information and research support in Australia".

Conclusion

Successful marketing, integrated into the everyday running of your library, is achievable with research, planning, and involvement of all staff. With a properly constructed, evolving marketing plan, a clear path ahead allows you to justify budget bids, plan resources, and evaluate your position in the market. Marketing and promotion should be embraced by our profession as another skill we can develop and become adept at.

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